

705-360 Douglas St. Victoria B.C. V8V 2P6

Nov. 5 1983

Dear Frances, The strike did happen after all. It started last Tuesday, so a whole group of us "exclusions" ~~was~~ were sent by air, <sup>at noon on the Monday</sup> over to the mainland — some to milk cows at the farm, but most of us to help with Dietary work, & we have now bonded out what that means. My first day was pretty catastrophic owing to total inexperience in institutional management & total lack of instruction but things are going much better now. I'm employed in a kitchen & dining room which catered for 33 patients — all very old geriatrics who are just extended care cases, all female. My shift starts 6 am — 2 pm, five working days plus 2 days off (which I'm having now, & was able to return to Victoria) ~~at~~ at Vancouver motel rates, it's cheaper for me to fly back. We don't have to cook. All the food is brought in a huge central cookhouse in big containers in a truck & kept hot on a "stean <sup>counter</sup> table" (which I now know how to operate). \* We only have to be able to make tea or coffee and toast, & dish out this food, set tables etc, but the greatest art lies in the washing of the dirty dishes in a rather primitive dish washer & preventing the food from sticking a little of me. I'm sure you will recall all the problems. You couldn't call us cooks — only bottle washers & skivvies. We have been

\* All the equipment is quite simple really once you know how, but these little tricks & even things.



② washing over the floors, but another team is going to do that next week. It really looks as though the powers that be are expecting this to settle in & be a long siege. It threatens to become a general strike & could become very serious, until someone's nerve cracks, and I do wish both sides could find a meeting point. At weekends, <sup>in Victoria</sup> of course I am happily fraternizing with my friends in the unions. Really I consider myself most fortunate to have been put into this sort of work & a rotating unit with very nice people, & the head nurse & nursing staff (there always see to be 4 or 5 on duty supervising the meal times) are all very good with the patients. Other people have been detailed off onto much worse jobs, & the very worst thing that can happen to an <sup>(or to anyone)</sup> exclusor is to be sent to work in the hospital laundries. Apart from the nature of the work I believe the working conditions are Dickensian. No one is allowed to speak & there is no music to relieve the situation. But these are the essential services that must be kept going. It pours with rain in the low mainland, and I feel sorry for the picketers, but they look like a determined bunch, in their Coverts knit woolly hats, umbrellas, rain wear, a make-shift plastic shelter & a fire going for anyone taking a rest spell, & I do hope they don't cave in.

I'm also lucky that I'm now in a motel by myself, away from the rest of the Agricultural bunch.



③ which is much more relaxing when off duty. I find so far that I have to have a good snooze when I get home & then I brighten up & go & have supper, but this always has to be a meal out, not always too satisfactory. Breakfast is a meal I can manage on a miniature cooking unit, & a bag lunch for us skivvies is brought round daily. (Unita rules are that we mustn't eat what the patients get — most of that goes right into the garbage.)

To elevate my mind I'm reading a very detailed biography of "Samuel Johnson" which is very interesting & an excellent escape hatch. He was a very interesting, extremely mixed up person & I've never known anything about him before.

My only problem just now is that I have become completely used to getting up at 4.30 a.m., & now cannot stay up late, and so this letter must close. Much love to you both.

On duty we wear sheepless coveralls, & bag hats (paper/disposable, & hideous!)

Much love

Sam